



West and Central Africa

KEY GENDER ISSUES

Three quarters of the poor population in West and Central Africa – about 90 million people – live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. More than 60 per cent of the active population work in the agriculture sector. Women’s share – estimated at 70 per cent in the region as a whole and 89 per cent in the Sahel – continues to rise.

Socio-politically, West and Central Africa is still very fragile, with the highest concentration of countries with IFAD operations. Despite this fragility and the poverty that affects over half the population, virtually all countries in the region have made considerable progress over the past decade, particularly in education, health and income redistribution. Between 2000 and 2014, a number of the region’s countries made impressive strides in their human development index (HDI): in Mali, the index improved from 0.204 in 2000 to 0.407 in 2014; in Niger from 0.198 to 0.337; in Sierra Leone from 0.247 to 0.374; and in Togo from 0.382 to 0.473.¹

Nevertheless, major inequalities persist between women and men in terms of access to resources that can improve their living conditions – particularly access to land, credit, and advisory and support services. Moreover, the situation for girls continues to be of concern, especially in rural areas where the school attendance rate for girls is less than 55 per cent, compared with 88 per cent for boys. Early marriage and pregnancy, a heavy domestic workload, limited access to education and early school leaving complicate their situation still further.

The Gambia: Mariama Jarju, owner and mother of 10, harvests rice with her farm workers in the village of Aljamdou.

Economic empowerment

During the past 15 years, women have taken over a growing share of responsibility for agriculture as able-bodied men and young people have joined the rural exodus in the face of rural unemployment. This trend is changing traditional gender roles as women become increasingly involved in farm management. While women account for more than 60 per cent of agricultural labour, however, there is little recognition for their work and they do not have equal access to the economic fruits of their labour.

In West and Central Africa, gender roles and positions in the production chain vary greatly by agroecological area and value chain. In many cases, however, women ensure food security for the household, look after the children and carry out productive tasks.

In terms of land tenure, even when equal access to land is embedded in the legislative framework, most women have no control over land management, which is often governed by customary land tenure systems.² Thus, although women have the same legal right to access land as men in 17 of the region's 24 countries, their access is restricted de facto by discriminatory practices (table 3). Rural women in most cases gain access to land either by inheritance or collectively through women's groups. Such attributions are frequently insecure and tenuous, and do not provide women with assurances that they will be able to farm the same land in subsequent years on a lasting basis.

Finally, women have limited access to other factors of production such as inputs and equipment, quality agricultural advisory assistance, financing, technology, training and markets.

Voice and participation

In the West and Central Africa region, despite the adoption of concrete actions such as the introduction of quotas to improve women's representation in decision-making within farmer organizations and rural institutions, rural women continue to have very little influence in the agriculture sector.

With lower educational levels than men, women are ill-equipped with technical and managerial skills and therefore continue to be underrepresented within decision-making bodies of economic cooperatives, mixed farmer organizations and rural finance

Côte d'Ivoire: Cathérine Traoré,
accountant at the Fronan credit union,
collects savings from villagers.



institutions. On the other hand, women's representation in decision-making bodies of management committees for community infrastructure – water supply, health care and education – is an estimated 40 per cent, and even higher in certain areas. Women's leadership is more acceptable in organizations whose members are virtually all women.

Still, the situation is changing slowly but surely, enabling women to assert themselves more strongly in economic and political terms. A case in point is the election of a woman as the head of the Pan-African Farmers' Organization (PAFO), as well as the entry of women's colleges within national platforms in many countries in the region.

Workloads and benefits

In West and Central Africa, women – in addition to their role in farming – are responsible for most domestic work, nutritional security, looking after children and seniors, and providing drinking water and firewood for household needs. These tasks occupy them for long hours each day. This division of labour is highly inequitable and places women at a disadvantage. In addition, they are marginalized from technical and technological innovations, as they have little involvement in designing and building the equipment they use.

Good practices do exist, however, such as the use of combines and dehuskers in Guinea, Mali and Senegal; and of crushers and mechanical graters in Cameroon and Nigeria. These tools have not only reduced local grain processing times by half, but also lightened the workloads involved. This has translated into higher production capacity, better quality and greater timeliness in meeting delivery deadlines agreed with customers.

IFAD STORIES FROM THE FIELD

In 2013, IFAD reached 7.4 million people in the West and Central Africa region, 51 per cent of them women. With 52 projects under way in 23 countries, there are many things that can be done or built upon to promote women's empowerment and well-being among rural households.

Burkina Faso: Improving access to land for rural women

The Sustainable Rural Development Programme (PDRD) in Burkina Faso was inspired by successful experiences elsewhere, such as Mauritania, in making structural improvements to rural women's access to land. With an inclusive and participatory approach, and despite sociocultural constraints, PDRD managed to achieve acceptance of the principle of physical access to land for rural women. This translated into allotment rates of 43 per cent for managed lowland rice plots and 64 per cent for market gardens, well in excess of the 30 per cent quota for women endorsed by Burkina Faso.

PDRD commenced with consultations between landowners and local administrative institutions, in this case communes, which will benefit from strengthened technical capacity and land use management. A campaign of awareness-raising, information and community support promoted a more favourable framework for access to land managed by the poorest, including women.

Both women and men farmers benefited from training on land access, and management committees were set up to ensure sound husbandry of the new institutional paradigm in which they will be living. Discussions and negotiations took place between landowners and beneficiaries and users on the terms of sale for land under communal authority. As a result, a land use charter was developed and signed, setting forth the agreement and commitment of both parties to adhere to the operating and management rules governing areas falling under communal supervision.

IFAD GENDER POLICY
Strategic objective 1:
Promote economic empowerment to enable rural women and men to have equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, profitable economic activities.

With this initiative, PDRD helped put an end to the insecure and tenuous allotment system that had victimized women market gardeners and left them vulnerable, with no assurances of being able to cultivate the same plot the following year. However, work remains to be done on enabling poor people to acquire title to managed land.

**Strategic objective 2:
Enable women and men
to have equal voice and
influence in rural
institutions and
organizations.**

Senegal: Strengthen production managed by women with better access to inputs

The Agricultural Value Chains Support Project in Senegal set up a system of access to inputs under an inclusive and participatory approach for women and young people of both sexes. The implementation of this approach in villages in the region of Kaolack strongly favoured access by rural women to managed market garden plots. Involving rural communities enabled gender parity to be restored with equitable allotments of cultivable land. Previously, two thirds of the land was allotted to men, and only one third to women. Today women have access to inputs, and rural communities are prepared to grant land to them on an individual basis. Preliminary results have led to emulation among women producers and to women processing local cereals – millet, sorghum, cowpea, sesame – setting up networks to join the processing chain.

In addition, with project support, they have acquired modern processing equipment such as combines and dryers to lighten their workloads, and have benefited from technical training to boost and add value to their production. The network is positioning itself as a market operator for women producers of millet, sorghum and cowpea in contracting with farmer organizations.

The approach that enabled PAFA to achieve these remarkable results is based on three elements: (i) an inclusive and participatory targeting strategy underpinned by support calibrated in response to specific needs of women and young people, the priority target groups; (ii) adapted ongoing awareness-raising and information campaigns and lobbying of local authorities; and (iii) actions to strengthen the productive capacities of men and women actors, oriented exclusively towards productivity and markets, to raise women's incomes.

The Gambia: Stimulating and innovative leadership by women

For the first time in The Gambia, the village of Kaba Kama in the Upper River region has a woman as a chief. Fatou Danso, with her status as chief and decision-making power, has managed to change rural people's perceptions of women and improve their economic opportunities and influence within the village.

The law grants village chiefs the authority to allot land to villagers – and she will do so responsibly and equitably. The lion's share of land had been reserved for men producing groundnuts. Fatou pushed for a four hectare area to be allotted to a group of ten women market gardeners so that each one could farm part of it. To improve operating conditions for the market gardens, Fatou asked for and obtained support for the women from the Livestock and Horticulture Development Project (LHDP) in the supply of inputs such as seed and fertilizer, agricultural advice and technical training, and financial management. Fatou and two of the group's members took part in a train-the-trainers event on market gardening cropping techniques and best practices, which they then shared and made available to the women's group.

The results of the support are apparent in a more than 30 per cent increase in the volume of production by the women's group and an improvement in vegetable quality. Fatoumata Sagna, one of the group's members, reserves part of her production for household consumption to enrich her family's diet. She sells the surplus in neighbouring markets to generate income for her husband and children, spending it on health care, clothing and education, and to provide security for the lean season.

Today, as a result of Fatou's leadership and farsightedness, the women have gained greater autonomy with the income they earn on market gardening. In collaboration with local authorities and village chiefs, LHDP intends to support stronger leadership by rural women and create conditions for facilitating access by rural women to land.

Niger: Village wells and boreholes free up time and energy to manage local initiatives in Aguié

The Project for the Promotion of Local Initiative for Development in Aguié in Niger has built 20 village wells and 15 boreholes, significantly improving the coverage of drinking water needs in the project area and reducing the time involved in fetching and carrying water. This has freed up time for women to take part in awareness-raising and training activities undertaken by the project, specifically to set up and manage food banks for the lean season and grain banks. The management committees for these banks are composed exclusively of women. This has had a striking effect on rural people's perceptions of women's decisive role and leadership in food security. The lean season banks have helped reduce rural exodus at the start of the growing season.

With manpower thus available, the most vulnerable families are able to increase their production and productivity. In a conservative environment where women have limited autonomy, women have gained social recognition through the considerable efforts deployed by the project to place them at the centre of its work – particularly by facilitating access to water. Today, thanks to training provided by the project and the efforts of committed and dynamic women, the management committees of 285 lean season banks and 46 grain banks are in their hands. They represent 25 per cent of village monitoring and evaluation committee members. Within agricultural advisory assistance groups, women enjoy the same prerogatives as their male colleagues and provide assistance to farmers without discrimination, and 62 per cent of the rural organizations set up with project support have women on their decision-making bodies. Lightening workloads in domestic chores has had an enormous impact on improving socio-economic conditions for rural women.

**Strategic objective 3:
Achieve a more equitable
balance in workloads and
in the sharing of
economic and social
benefits between women
and men.**

Mali: two women plant a tree in the Sahel region.



LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

1. Adopting a differentiated strategy that is both inclusive and participatory to mainstream a gender perspective

There is no single universal strategy in gender equality and women's empowerment that is adapted to all societies. In view of the variety of sociocultural contexts and living conditions in West and Central Africa, IFAD implements a differentiated gender approach that reflects the specific circumstances of each country, by means of: (i) inclusive targeting mechanisms that take into account potential factors exacerbating women's vulnerability and marginalization; (ii) adopting, as above, an inclusive and participatory approach that is also directed to men and local authorities to obtain their support and collaboration; and (iii) adapted awareness-raising and information campaigns to ensure that all key actors are included who could potentially support or hinder IFAD's work.

In Chad, including the wives of nomadic herders in the dynamic of mobile pastoral systems is a major innovation in response to the marginalization in which they lived. Today these women have access to functional literacy and undertake income-generating activities.

In Sierra Leone, inclusive targeting mechanisms such as direct targeting and gender-sensitive eligibility criteria have enabled rural women who are handicapped war victims to access financial services and support services for economic activities.

2. Focusing on economic determinants to change rural women's lives sustainably

To underpin economic empowerment and bring about lasting change in the lives of rural women, IFAD opted to: (i) assign priority to activities and value chains in which poor households and women are most present or could easily join – roots and tubers, rice, maize, millet, sorghum, cowpea, hibiscus, market gardening, poultry breeding, small livestock, and processing and marketing crops, livestock and fish; (ii) support economic value addition within such value chains where women are prevalent, once

Ghana: Gladys Pomaah, automotive painter, with two of her apprentices, at work in Bibiani.



considered minor or marginal; and (iii) support economic dynamics to reposition food crops, hitherto destined exclusively for self-consumption, within a new market-oriented economic paradigm.

In Congo and Senegal, equal access by women to certified seed together with quality and proximity advisory assistance is narrowing – and in some cases eliminating – the gap in crop yields and productivity between women and men.

3. Taking action on multiple fronts to boost results and impact

Acting simultaneously on all three objectives of the policy on gender equality and women's empowerment has enabled IFAD to achieve tangible results. Raising educational levels for rural women with training in functional literacy, good practices and cropping techniques, lightening their workload of farm and household chores and strengthening their economic power have all enabled women to build a leadership position in farmer organizations and rural institutions. Rural women today are increasingly an integral part of the decision-making process in mixed farmer organizations, making their voices heard and creating conditions for a sustainable balance in the division of labour between women and men.

In Ghana, women's access to business training, financial services and appropriate advisory assistance has greatly contributed to the emergence of women entrepreneurs in rural areas, to a considerable increase in rural women's incomes, and to strengthening women's leadership.

In The Gambia, in response to needs expressed locally by a woman village chief, collaboration between the rural commune and village chiefs led to the granting of previously private land to women.

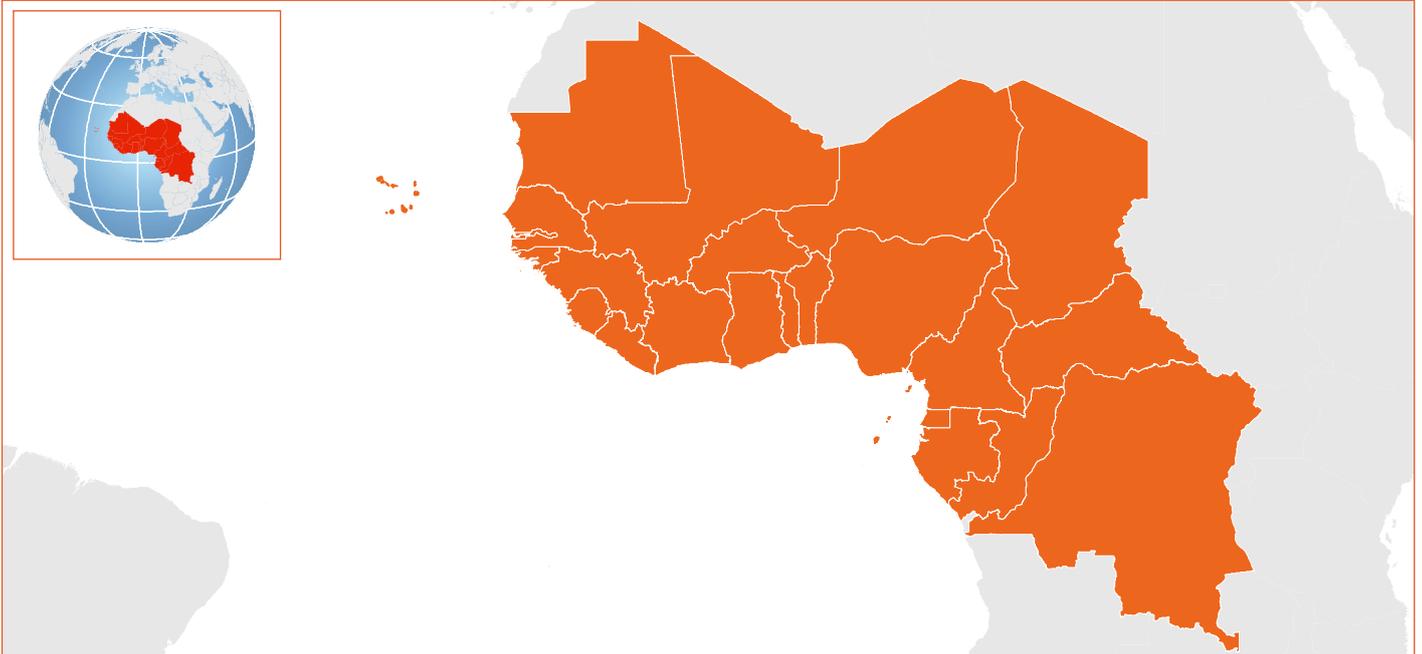
Sao Tomé and Príncipe: a man and a woman at work in the organic cocoa collecting station in Monte Forte, 30 km from the capital, Sao Tome.



OUTSTANDING ISSUES AND ONGOING CHALLENGES

- **Access to land and land tenure.** Arrangements to facilitate land access for rural women offer a way out of poverty but also a challenge deeply rooted in the region's social context. They provide access to agricultural, financial and non-financial services. Successful experiences must come up with solutions to change regulatory frameworks and traditional practices in a lasting way, thus enabling scaling up and ensuring post-project sustainability.
- **Sharing of knowledge and good practices.** Capitalizing on successful experiences and engaging in exchanges and knowledge-sharing leverage the dissemination of good practices and lessons learned in similar contexts elsewhere in the region. IFAD strives to strengthen mechanisms in support of knowledge-sharing and best practices in the region, both at the operational and policy dialogue level.
- **Making project operations more effective in terms of gender and policy dialogue.** Mainstreaming gender into project design is a requirement at IFAD in accordance with the policy on gender equality and women's empowerment. The West and Central Africa Division is deploying efforts to this end, specifically by means of capacity-strengthening in targeting and gender, sharing methodological tools and techniques to improve project performance and impact on poverty reduction, and sharing good practices, innovations and lessons learned through various networks. All of this will enrich and further strengthen policy dialogue.

Countries in West and Central Africa with ongoing IFAD-supported activities



THE STATISTICS AND WHAT THEY SHOW

The West and Central Africa region is host to a large number of countries with a low development index (20 of 23 countries), and only four have a medium rating: Cape Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Ghana. Life expectancy for women and men is similar to that of the East and Southern Africa region. Women and men in Cape Verde have a life expectancy of 71 and 78 years, respectively, while in Chad the numbers are 51 and 54 years. In countries with higher per capita incomes, such as Cape Verde and Gabon, the literacy rate for women and men considered as a whole is very high at close to 90 per cent. Generally speaking, more than half the population over 15 years of age are literate in the region. Many challenges persist, however, for countries such as Benin, Chad and Mali, where women have a very low literacy rate compared with men, while the latter themselves post a low rate compared with men elsewhere in the world (table 1).

Table 1: Key development indicators across the region

Country	GDP per capita (current US\$) (2013)	Life expectancy at birth (in years) (2012)		Literacy rate, ages 15+ (2012)	
		Women	Men	Women (% of women)	Men (% of men)
Benin	805	61	58	30	55
Burkina Faso	684	56	55	22	37
Cape Verde	3 767	79	71	80	90
Cameroon	1 329	56	54	78	65
Congo	3 167	60	57	78	90
Côte d'Ivoire	1 529	51	50	47	65
Gabon	11 571	64	62	85	92
Gambia (The)	489	60	57	40	60
Ghana	1 858	62	60	65	78
Guinea	523	57	55	30	52
Guinea-Bissau	564	56	53	42	69
Equatorial Guinea	24 036	54	51	91	97
Liberia	454	61	59	57	65
Mali	715	54	55	20	36
Mauritania	1 069	63	60	51	65
Niger	415	58	58	15	43
Nigeria	3 006	52	52	50	72
Central African Republic	333	51	48	44	70
Democratic Republic of the Congo	484	51	48	57	77
Sao Tomé and Príncipe	1 610	68	64	78	92
Senegal	1 047	65	62	30*	51*
Sierra Leone	679	46	45	24	47
Chad	1 054	52	50	25	46
Togo	636	57	55	47*	75*

Source: World Bank database (2008-2012).

Note: *2009 data.

The social institutions and gender index (SIGI) created by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) takes account of discriminatory social institutions such as early marriage, discriminatory inheritance practices, violence against women, son bias, restricted access to public space and unequal access to land and credit (table 2). Ghana and Senegal are ranked the highest, whereas the ratings for Benin, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali are among the lowest.

Table 2: Human development and gender inequality across the region, 2014

Country	Human development index (HDI) [•] (186 countries) Source: UNDP	Gender inequality index (GII) ^{••} Source: PNUD	Social institutions and gender index (SIGI) ^{•••} (Rank of 86 non-OECD countries) Source: OECD
	Rank	Value	Rank
Benin	165	0.614	134
Burkina Faso	181	0.607	133
Cape Verde	123	-	-
Cameroon	152	0.622	138
Congo	140	0.617	-
Côte d'Ivoire	171	0.645	143
Gabon	112	0.508	108
Gambia (The)	172	0.624	139
Ghana	138	0.549	123
Guinea	179	-	-
Guinea-Bissau	177	-	-
Equatorial Guinea	136	-	-
Liberia	175	0.655	145
Mali	176	0.655	148
Mauritania	161	0.644	142
Niger	187	0.709	151
Nigeria	152	-	-
Central African Republic	185	0.654	144
Democratic Republic of the Congo	186	0.669	147
Sao Tomé and Príncipe	142	-	-
Senegal	163	0.537	119
Sierra Leone	183	0.643	141
Chad	184	0.707	150
Togo	166	0.579	129

Source: UNDP HDI; UN data 2014; OECD SIGI database 2012.

Notes: [•]The HDI is a composite measure of health, education and income, and an alternative to purely economic assessments of national progress (e.g. GDP growth).
Source: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/>.

^{••}The GII is a composite measure that reflects inequality in achievements between women and men in reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. The index ranges between "0", which means women fare equally well, to "1.0", which indicates that women fare as poorly as possible in all dimensions measured.

Source: <https://data.undp.org/dataset/Table-4-Gender-Inequality-Index/pq34-nwq7>.

^{•••}The SIGI introduces 12 innovative indicators on social institutions, which are grouped into five categories: family code; physical safety; son preference; civil liberties; and ownership rights. Each of the SIGI indicators is rated between "0", meaning no or very low inequality, and "1" indicating very high inequality.

Source: <http://genderindex.org/ranking>.

In addition, the maternal mortality risk is highly variable, with wide variations among countries. Of particular concern is the situation in Central Africa, in Chad, Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone. In Cape Verde and Sao Tomé and Príncipe, maternal mortality is virtually under control with very low rates, at 79 and 70 per 100,000 live births, respectively. Wide variations are also seen in women's share of the active population, from 29 per cent in Mauritania to 77 per cent in Burkina Faso. Men's share of the active population varies less, and the lowest rate is 64 per cent in Nigeria. As in other regions, women's contribution to active life is often unpaid and may therefore be underrepresented in available data. Finally, although in theory there is legal equality between men and women in access to land and property, in reality discriminatory practices continue to restrict women in exercising their rights (table 3).

Table 3: Key gender indicators across the region

Country	Maternal mortality ratio (modelled estimate, per 100,000 live births) (2013) Source: World Bank	Women's access to land• (2014) Source: OECD	Women's access to bank loans•• (2014) Source: OECD	Labour participation rate, ages 15+ (2013) Source: World Bank	
				Women %	Men %
Benin	340	0.5	0.5	68	78
Burkina Faso	400	0.5	0.5	77	90
Cape Verde	53	-	-	51	84
Cameroon	590	0.5	0.5	52	77
Congo	410	0.5	0	69	73
Côte d'Ivoire	720	0.5	0.5	52	81
Gabon	240	0.5	0.5	56	65
Gambia (The)	430	1.0	0.5	72	83
Ghana	380	1.0	0.5	67	71
Guinea	650	0.5	0.5	66	78
Guinea-Bissau	560	0.5	0.5	68	79
Equatorial Guinea	240	-	0.5	91	-
Liberia	640	0.5	0	58	65
Mali	550	0.5	0	51	81
Mauritania	320	0.5	0.5	29	79
Niger	630	0.5	0.5	40	90
Nigeria	560	0.5	1.0	48	64
Central African Republic	880	0.5	0.5	73	85
Democratic Republic of the Congo	730	0.5	1.0	71	73
Sao Tomé and Príncipe	210	-	-	45	78
Senegal	320	0.5	0	66	88
Sierra Leone	1 100	0.5	0.5	66	69
Chad	980	0.5	0.5	64	79
Togo	450	0.5	0.5	81	81

Source: World Bank database 2008-2013; OECD SIGI database 2014.

Notes: •Women's legal and de facto rights to own and access agricultural land: 0: Women have equal legal rights with men to own and access land; 0.5: Women have the same legal rights to own and access land, but are restricted due to discriminatory practices; 1.0: Women have few or no legal rights to access or own land, or access is severely restricted by discriminatory practices.

••Women's legal and de facto access to loans and credit: 0: Women have equal rights to access credit and bank loans with men; 0.5: Women have rights to access some kinds of credit (e.g. microcredit), or have equal rights but face discrimination in accessing bank loans and credit; 1.0: Women have few or no rights to access bank loans or credit, or access is severely restricted by discriminatory practices.

KEY RESOURCES

- ¹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2013, *Human Development Report 2013*, UNDP, New York. Available at the following URL: <http://hdr.undp.org/fr/content/rapport-sur-le-d%C3%A9veloppement-humain-2013>
- ² Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 2008, *L'accès des femmes à la terre en Afrique de l'Ouest: problématique et pistes de solutions au Sénégal et au Burkina Faso*, Round-table, Dimitra Project, FAO, Rome. Available at the following URL: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/016/ap532f/ap532f.pdf>

CONTACTS

Khadija Néné Doucouré
Regional Gender Coordinator,
Youth Inclusion and
Capacity-strengthening of
Farmer Organizations

Clare Bishop-Sambrook
Lead Technical Specialist,
Gender and Social Inclusion
Policy and Technical
Advisory Division
IFAD
Tel: +39 06 54592489
E-mail: c.bishopsambrook@ifad.org

LINKS

IFAD policy on gender equality and
women's empowerment
[http://www.ifad.org/gender/policy/
gender_e.pdf](http://www.ifad.org/gender/policy/gender_e.pdf)

IFAD is an international financial
institution and a specialized United
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rural areas of developing countries.



International Fund for
Agricultural Development
Via Paolo di Dono, 44
00142 Rome, Italy
Tel: +39 06 54591
Fax: +39 06 5043463
E-mail: ifad@ifad.org
www.ifad.org
www.ruralpovertyportal.org

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May 2015

Senegal: Fatim Samba has eight children
and owns a small bakery in Ndiaffate
village, Kaolack.

